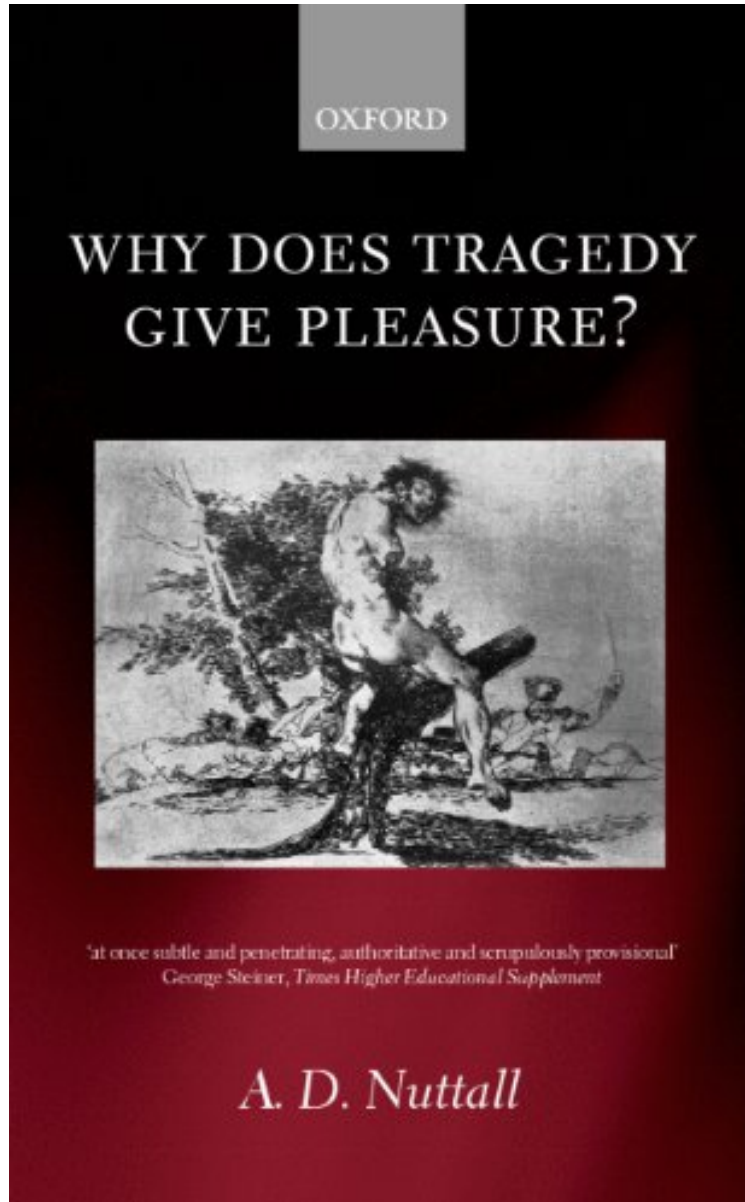


(Mobile book) Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?

Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?

A. D. Nuttall

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A. D. Nuttall : Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure? before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. The Game Of DeathBy R. W. RasbandNuttall's short, 100 page book can get pretty densely academic in its prose for a general reader like me. But it's rewarding when he boils down his argument in the last 50 or so pages. He says that tragedy in literature is a "game of death" that we play in order to

rehearse for the worst that can happen. So far, so good. But then Nuttall deftly demonstrates how in *King Lear* (Norton Critical Editions) Shakespeare deliberately breaks all the rules of the game of classical tragedy in order to write the most horrific story he could imagine. And we love the play anyway. So it turns out that tragedy is not just a game after all, but a gate to knowledge we could never otherwise get, except by actually experiencing tragedy ourselves in real life. So the problem of "tragedy giving pleasure" remains. Because there is a mystery at the center of life that is inexplicable--except through the feelings we have at the end of a great book, or play like "*Lear*." This is a stimulating little essay.

Why does tragedy give pleasure? Why do people who are neither wicked nor depraved enjoy watching plays about suffering or death? Is it because we see horrific matter controlled by majestic art? Or because tragedy actually reaches out to the dark side of human nature? A. D. Nuttall's wide-ranging, lively and engaging book offers a new answer to this perennial question. The 'classical' answer to the question is rooted in Aristotle and rests on the unreality of the tragic presentation: no one really dies; we are free to enjoy watching potentially horrible events controlled and disposed in majestic sequence by art. In the nineteenth century, Nietzsche dared to suggest that Greek tragedy is involved with darkness and unreason and Freud asserted that we are all, at the unconscious level, quite wicked enough to rejoice in death. But the problem persists: how can the conscious mind assent to such enjoyment? Strenuous bodily exercise is pleasurable. Could we, when we respond to a tragedy, be exercising our emotions, preparing for real grief and fear? *King Lear* actually destroys an expected majestic sequence. Might the pleasure of tragedy have more to do with possible truth than with 'splendid evasion'?

"This delightful little book not only attracts the reader with its enigmatic title, it ensnares her into following its argument like a detective story, whose solution is not disclosed before its final pages. In a style more reminiscent of poetry than a philological treatise it deserves to be handled with care...."--Bryn Mawr Classical Review
A. D. Nuttall is Professor of English and Fellow of New College, Oxford